

LGBTSA Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 3

April 4, 2013

Happy 1 Year Birthday LGBTSA!

On April 6, 2012, LGBTSA held its first meeting with VTel sites at Palo Alto, Menlo Park, San Jose, Modesto, and Livermore VAPAHCS campuses and employees calling in on VANTS from other areas. Our first meeting had 35 employees from 5 campuses with representation from a variety of services including Social Work, Psychology, Nursing, Public Affairs, EEO, Logistics, HUDVASH, Trauma Recovery Program, Extended Care, MHICM, Tele-health, and Workforce Development. Later meetings were also attended by employees from Pharmacy, Engineering and Housekeeping. Participants of the first meeting spontaneously self identified (i.e. they were not asked to come out) as the following:

Gay Men=8

Lesbian Women= 11

Bi/Pan/Multisexual=2

Queer=2

Heterosexual=2

No Comment= 10

Following this meeting, participants identified the group's name and goals through an online form which collected the following quotes:

"So nice we're doing something (LGBTSA) here, we need to stop being afraid to be who we are at work. Felt like a lone ranger before this SEP group."

"The most important thing for me is to provide advocacy in order to support equality for federal employees, such as health benefits and other benefits provided to hetero-

sexual spouses which are currently denied to same-sex spouses."

"It was wonderful! As I have been out/coming out only a short time (after 20 years of adult life and het marriage), I felt a little uncomfortable at first thinking I had to 'announce' myself as gay in a work setting, thus far only having done it with safe people in my life (I am also starting a new career, and new with the VA). However, I quickly realized no one was making me do anything, that all I had to do is be honest and be myself, in whatever way felt natural and comfortable for me. It felt great to be able to speak and just be there. Thank you for providing the safe and accepting milieu in which to do so! "

"I thought the meeting was excellent. I was impressed by the turn-out. Just goes to show the level of interest. I thought it was good to include the sites other than PAD. I'm hoping this will ease my coming out at work. A very scary thought but a step I want to take...well, maybe baby steps at first. "

In the past year LGBTSA has accomplished the following:

1. Outreach at San Francisco and San Jose Gay Pride Parade/Celebration
2. Built an LGBT Program Webpage and Share-Point
3. Provided LGBT-related trainings to the follow-



ing groups: TRP, CLC, Social Work Service, ATS, Social Work Supervisees, MH Leadership, Recreation Therapy Service, and Integrated Ethics at VAPAHCS. On a national level - Office of Diversity and Inclusion, National LGBT Research Workgroup and Recreation Therapy.

4. Created a newsletter
5. Participating on national LGBT Research Workgroup and LGBT Employee Resource Group
6. Submitted an application for VAPAHCS to be rated a leader in LGBT Health Care through the Human Rights Campaign Healthcare Equality Index
7. Advocated for successful revision of EEO policy to include gender identity
8. Held an off-campus social gathering for LGBTSA members.

Many thanks to all who have participated in LGBTSA over its first year of existence at VAPAHCS. We have much to celebrate and I am so very PROUD to be your colleague!

Sincerely,

Heliana Ramirez

LGBTSA SEP Manager

Next LGBTSA Meeting Thursday, April 25th Noon-1pm

- VTel Locations
- **PAD Bldg 100** Extended Care Conference Room A4 110
- **MPD Bldg334** Director's Conference Room E207
- **San Jose** Training Room B200a
- VANTS Line
- 1800 767-1750
- Access Code 86067

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Healthcare Equality Index 2012

Promoting Equitable and Inclusive Care for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Patients and Their Families

VAPAHCS EEO Policy is revised to include gender identity!



2013 HRC HEI Application is submitted!!

On April 1, 2013 the VAPAHCS Healthcare Equality Index was submitted for rating by the Human Rights Campaign. This application was a major accomplishment as it involved planning and organizing for 3 months including the following:

1. Identifying anti-discrimination policies for both Veterans and employees related to sexual orientation and gender identity.
2. Identifying Equal Hospital Visitation Policy
3. Posting the three policies on our LGBT Program webpage, inpatient hospital magazine and new

patient orientation handbook.

4. Outreaching to employees throughout VAPAHCS to encourage participation in online LGBT-related trainings including 5 executive level managers.
5. Completing the HEI online application including uploading of examples of places where the policies are made publicly available for Veterans and employees.

Many thanks to the following VAPAHCS staff who assisted in completing this application either through meetings, policy review/revisions, web-

site development, and/or organizing staff training spreadsheets (listed alphabetically):

Stephen Ezeji-Okoye

Steve Finkelman

Jennifer Flagg

Jonathon Friedman

Shannon Healer

Michael Hill-Jackson

Dave Leo

Heliana Ramirez

Tiffany Rideaux

Andrea Ritz

Beth Stovall

Fingers crossed we receive the prestigious rating of Leader!

EEO Anti-discrimination Policy has been revised for Staff!

On March 11, 2013, VAPAHCS' anti-discrimination policy for staff (Health Care System Bulletin No. 2013) was amended and signed by Director Freeman as follows:

It is the policy of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) to provide equal opportunity in employment for all employees and applicants for employment regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, pregnancy, gender identity, parental status, marital status, sexual orientation, age, disability, genetic information, political affiliation, or retaliation for opposing discriminatory practices or participating in the discrimination complaint process, and to maintain a work environment that is free of any form of unlawful discrimination, including all forms of workplace harassment (both sexual and non-sexual). All employees and applicants for employment should receive fair and equitable treatment in all aspects of personnel management and will be provided

prompt, fair, and impartial review and adjudication of complaints involving issues of employment discrimination. Equal opportunity covers all personnel/employment programs, management practices, and decisions including, but not limited to, recruitment/hiring, merit promotion, transfer, reassignments, training and career development, benefits, and separations. Discrimination against employees based on protected genetic information, or on information about a request for or the receipt of,

genetic services is prohibited. No individual on the basis of race, sex, color, national

origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, marital

status, genetic information, political affiliation, retaliation or status as a parent, shall be

excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be sub-

jected to

discrimination in a federally conducted education and training program or activity. Any

federally-conducted programs or activities operated with VA funds will comply with

established Limited English Proficiency (LEP) guidance."

Complaints must be brought to EEO within 45 days of the date of the discriminatory incident. Many thanks to EEO staff Beth Stovall and Jennifer Flagg for their leadership in revising this policy to include gender identity!

To read more, check out the policy on the LGBT Program Webpage at <http://www.paloalto.va.gov/lgbt.asp>.

Statement by HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius on LGBT Health Awareness Week

Shortly after the Affordable Care Act was enacted, President Obama asked me to identify steps we could take at the Department of Health and Human Services to improve the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Americans. As we mark the beginning of LGBT Health Awareness Week, I am proud to say that we have been working hard to ensure LGBT Americans have the same rights and protections as other Americans.

For example, we have released rules requiring Medicare and Medicaid-participating hospitals to allow visitation rights for same-sex partners. This means LGBT Americans now have the same opportunities as other Americans to be with their families and loved ones when they are sick.

LGBT Americans have experienced – and continue to experience – health disparities and are more likely than other Americans to be uninsured or underinsured. Now, because of the Affordable Care Act, our major national health surveys are beginning to include data on LGBT populations. This will give us the information we need to target and reduce disparities among this group going forward. We have also formed an internal working group to ensure we’re developing and coordinating policies targeted at increasing access to care for LGBT Americans and addressing their special health care needs.

Globally, we are leading efforts to advance a World Health Organization resolution supporting the health of LGBT populations around the world through equal access to health care services and by breaking down stigma and discrimination that create barriers to care.

In addition, like all Americans, LGBT individuals will continue to benefit from the Affordable Care Act. Beginning in January 2014, Americans will have access to quality, affordable coverage through the new Health Insurance Marketplace—where they can begin to shop for and easily compare health insurance plans starting in October 2013.

Starting in 2014, Americans will no longer be denied coverage or locked out of the health insurance market just because they are sick or have a pre-existing condition. And millions of Americans with private insurance and Medicare already have access to preventive services like blood pressure screenings at no cost to them.

You can learn more about the new Marketplace—and sign up for updates about enrollment—by visiting www.HealthCare.gov/Marketplace.

Moving forward, we remain committed to improving the health of all Americans, including LGBT Americans, and we look forward to continuing this work during LGBT Health Awareness Week and beyond.

Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) Repealed: LGBT Military Issues Moving Forward

The U.S. Department of Defense hosts a website entitled “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell is Repealed” where abundant information is available regarding the repeal and subsequent issues faced by LGBT military personnel. This is a useful site to get a sense of the experiences LGBT veterans may have faced in the final months of DADT and now as Veterans seeking benefits for themselves and same-sex partners that may come up in clinical practice.

Check out [this website](#) for information including news articles such as:

“Same Sex Couples Can Claim New Benefits by October”

This site also hosts videos:

“DOD Calls for Troop Input”

and Fact Sheets such as:

“DADT Quick Reference Guide”

“Member-Designated Benefits Currently Available”

Finally, this site also includes

numerous reports on LGBT military-related experiences prior to DADT and through implementation of DADT repeal.

For information on how to upgrade gay-related discharges, check out the Service Members Legal Defense Network’s [page on discharge upgrades](#).

If you would like clinical consultation for your work with an LGBT Veteran, call Heliana Ramirez, LISW at 650 444-8586.



LGBT Staff and Allies Newsletter

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Please send Heliana ideas of stories to be featured in the next issue of the LGBTSA Newsletter!

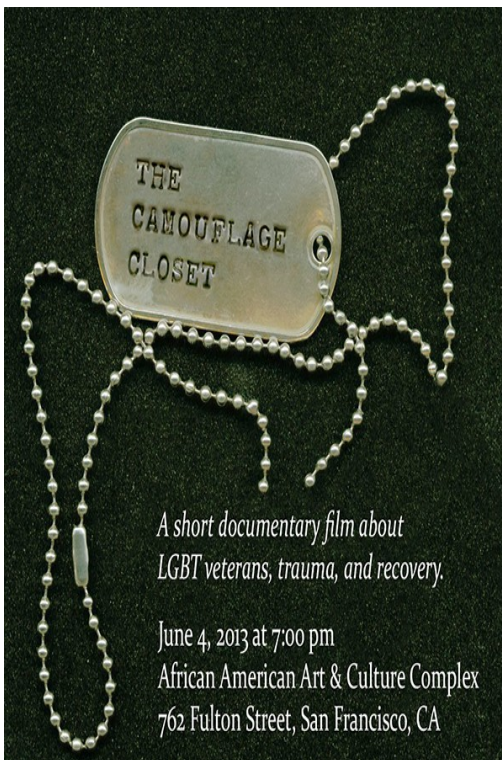
VAPAHCS LGBT Programs are on the web!
Visit us at

<http://www.paloalto.va.gov/lgbtsa.asp>

The VAPAHCS LGBT Staff and Allies is a group of over 30 VA employees who began meeting in April, 2012. The purpose of LGBTSA is to raise awareness about LGBT Veteran and employee experiences at VAPAHCS through public relations campaign, staff training and resource development for the hospital system. Through community outreach, LGBTSA strives to increase VA enrollment among LGBT Veteran Patients and encourage employment applications from LGBT civilians and Veterans.

LGBTSA members work in a variety of departments across the VA Palo Alto Healthcare System including Social Work, Psychology, Medicine, Recreation Therapy, Engineering and Housekeeping to name a few. Members identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and as allies to the LGBT community. LGBTSA welcomes anyone who is interested in making VAPAHCS the choice for LGBT Veterans seeking care and LGBT people seeking employment.

SAVE the Date! LGBT Veterans' Stories of Trauma and Recovery



*A short documentary film about
LGBT veterans, trauma, and recovery.*

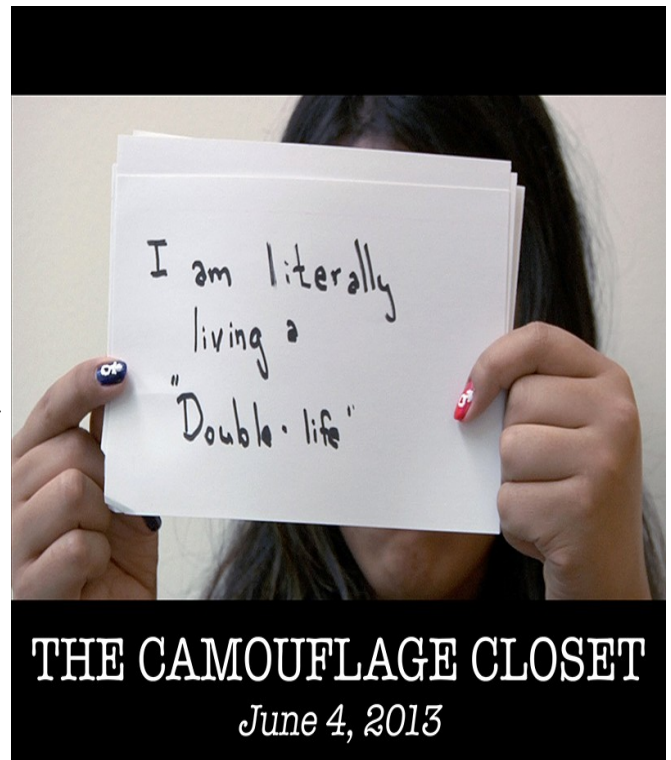
June 4, 2013 at 7:00 pm
African American Art & Culture Complex
762 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA

This film features veterans from the VAPAHCS LGBT Veteran Support Group and is co-produced by Stanford Med Student and filmmaker Michael Nedelman and VAPAHCS Social Worker Heliana Ramirez, LISW.

This film is made possible by support from Stanford University and VAPAHCS.

Save the date & plan to join us- it will be a night to remember!

For more information, contact Heliana at 650 444-8586 or email Heliana.Ramirez@va.gov.



THE CAMOUFLAGE CLOSET
June 4, 2013